CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.869
8 March 2001

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND SIXTY-NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 8 March 2001, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Juan Enrique Vega (Chile)

GE.01-60763 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I call to order the 869th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

First of all, allow me to extend a cordial welcome, both on behalf of the Conference and on my behalf, to the representatives of non-governmental organizations who are with us today. As you know, today is International Women's Day. Accordingly, and pursuant to established practice here in the Conference, participants in the annual disarmament seminar held on the occasion of International Women's Day have addressed a message to the Conference. I am sure that I speak for the Conference when I extend our best wishes to all the women who are present at this forum and say how much we appreciate their steadfast commitment to peace and disarmament, as well as their abiding interest in our work.

I would also like once again to welcome Ambassador Eui-Yong Chung, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea, who is attending the meetings of the Conference on Disarmament for the first time. You are very welcome, Ambassador, and we look forward to excellent cooperation with you.

I would also like to greet Dr. Rajmah Hussain, the new Ambassador of Malaysia. We are very pleased to welcome her on a day such as today, when we are celebrating International Women's Day. Together with greeting her, we would also like to greet all the other lady ambassadors present.

Before giving the floor to the Secretary-General of the Conference, I would like to inform you that, as I said in the presidential consultations yesterday, it is my intention immediately after the present plenary meeting to convene informal open-ended consultations on possible measures to continue our consultations on the programme of work and other complementary activities, in order to facilitate agreement with respect to that programme.

I would now like to ask the Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, to read out the message addressed to the Conference by the participants in the seminar.

Mr. PETROVSKY (Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations): Mr. President, before reading the joint non-governmental organization statement, I would like to take this opportunity to join you in congratulating very sincerely all the women present here, both the members of the delegations and representatives of the non-governmental organizations on International Women's Day on their contribution to the activities of our Conference for the encouragement of practical deeds.

I now have the honour to read the joint non-governmental organization statement to the United Nations Conference on Disarmament.

"Distinguished members of the Conference on Disarmament, the participants of the International Women's Day Disarmament Seminar in Geneva appreciate the

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opportunity to address you once again on International Women's Day. It is one of the few occasions that the concerns and wishes of non-governmental organizations can be voiced in this unique forum, in which concrete measures can, and have been taken to rid the world of specific weapons and advance toward disarmament. However, we must state that we have been deeply disappointed and are disheartened over the fact that opportunities have been missed during these past several years and so little has been achieved during this period.

"Mr. President, we urge the Conference on Disarmament and especially the member States not to allow the deadlock to continue, and in that sense we wish to make the following observations.

"Mr. President, nowadays the perceived need for armament is not so much related to the conquest of territory but more to the imposition of ideology. Throughout history, there have been nations that have believed themselves to be superior to others and who consequently sought to impose their way of life and their beliefs on others by threat or use of force. They were mistaken. One cannot produce good by means of threats and brute force. Only persuasion and good example can teach good governance.

"Recent developments in the international security environment have brought us back to a crossroads, where we have been so often during the past half century, deciding whether to take the path of cooperation on which the United Nations is founded, or the path of military confrontation. The fate of the Conference on Disarmament is both an indicator and a significant determining factor as to which will be followed. Knowing that in our present world the path of confrontation can only lead to universal disaster, we urge the Conference to address the political difficulties and differences within the relevant negotiations rather than letting them become the destructive means of blocking further progress.

"There have been remarkable successes in the field of arms limitation and restraint and a number of them were achieved in this chamber. Many treaties were born from humble beginnings with General Assembly resolutions. One such is the Biological Weapons Convention, which has now reached a crucial stage in its path towards more effective implementation, as we wait to see if dominant countries and pharmaceutical interests will allow the current verification negotiations to succeed. Let us also note that, during this past half century, with only a very few exceptions, arms control treaties have been observed and no State has withdrawn from a major arms control treaty, whether multilateral or bilateral. This is a significant record of achievement and commitment to restraint and good sense - a record that should be maintained.

"What a great contribution this can be to the United Nations-declared Decade of a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World that we have just entered. A culture of peace means a modified value system. Pride in the observance of

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treaty commitments; pride in withholding vetoes; pride in refraining from power games and concentrating solely on the future welfare of humanity. It is in that spirit that we call upon you immediately to accept and implement the work programme proposal contained in document CD/1624, particularly paragraphs 1, 2 and 3.

"The time has come to put aside interpretations as to what might be discussed under the heading of preparation, before any subsequent negotiations are allowed to begin. Of course, such negotiations should not inhibit or be a substitute for progress in other direct inter-State or regional negotiations, but that consideration should apply as the usual practice. Negotiations have to start somewhere. The groundwork must be laid somehow. Those who have followed the work of this multilateral negotiating body - including those watching from the gallery and those who havebeen kept informed of your work over the years - believe that, at least for the first year, the substantial work necessary to prepare the groundwork for treaties would be much the same whether called negotiations or pre-negotiations. The point is to get started. Furthermore, we urge that, while pre-negotiations or negotiations on these important issues are taking place, States refrain from pursuing further research and testing of any devices that could undermine the talks.

"We urge you and the capitals that you represent to turn your thoughts to the distant future when others will occupy the places you hold today. Because of your endeavours, our descendants will have the chance of life, health and peace. Or not. Your actions should be guided so as to earn their respect.

"Concerning the Conference's agenda item on a comprehensive programme of disarmament, we wish to underline the importance we give tothe question of small arms.

"Mr. President, in view of the forthcoming third Preparatory Committee meeting for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade of Smal Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, we would like to mention that this year's International Women's Day Disarmament Seminar is entitled 'In the line of fire: A genderperspective on small arms proliferation, peace-building and conflict resolution'.

"The pattern of violent conflict and arms transfers has significantly changed in recent years. United Nations studies estimate that around 300 manufacturers in more than 70 countries are producing small arms and light weapons. While a significant number of these weapons end up in the hands of State forces, a large number are found in the hands of irregular armies, communal factions, crime and dug syndicates, as well as individuals.

"An overwhelming majority of conflicts have been fought with small arms and light weapons. Of the 49 regional conflicts waged since 1990 small arms and light weapons have been the weapons of choice in 46. They kill almost as many people in

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countries that are not at war. In post-conflict situations interpersonal violence replaces violence between warring factions if weapons remain in circulation, and in many other countries small arms figure prominently in violent crimes, domestic assault, rape, sexual violence, suicides and accidents - legally or illegally possessed. An estimated 500,000 to 700,000 lives are claimed each year by the use of these weapons. This is an average of 1,700 deaths per day or one person dying every minute.

"We recognize that the availability of small arms is not the cause of armed conflict, but their easy and cheap accessibility facilitates the transformation of social and political conflicts into violent ones and contribute to the militarization of society.

"Women are particularly affected by the wide availability and use of small arms both in times of war and in times of peace. It is a sad fact that women are increasingly participating as combatants in armed conflicts. However, statistics show that they remain the primary victims in such situations. Women's experience in armed conflicts are markedly different to those of men. Women are strategic targets due to their role as biological, cultural and social reproducers of their societies and are subject to gender-based violence at the hands of power wielded through a handgun or an AK-47. On the other hand, manufacturers of small arms are increasingly targeting women as potential buyers and users of small arms, capitalizing on their need for safety.

"The process of economic globalization, the ongoing systematic impoverishment of countries in the economically poor regions, and the erosion of human security not only facilitate small arms proliferation and diffusion, but also weaken the influence of the State adequately to control and regulate the supply and demand of small arms and light weapons. Economic disparities between and within countries are creating conditions in which weapons are considered the only solution to secure a livelihood. The demand for small arms is in this way directly and indirectly encouraged, especially in urban communities.

"In a momentous decision last year, the United Nations Security Council recognized the important role of women in the prevention, resolution, and management of conflicts, as well as in peace-building, when it adopted resolution 1325. Women are effective actors in peace negotiations and their contributions to achieve positive peace have been recognized on paper. It is imperative that all obstacles to the full participation of women at all levels and in all forums be removed.

"It seems to us equally imperative that the Conference on Disarmament resume its efforts speedily to achieve a comprehensive programme for disarmament.

"In conclusion, we wish you every success in moving disarmament forward and thank you for hearing us."

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank Mr. Petrovsky for reading out the message of the seminar, and I now give the floor to the coordinator of the Group of 21, the Ambassador of Morocco.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco) (translated from French): Mr. President, on behalf of the delegations which are members of the Group of 21 - whom I have not actually consulted but I do not think that any of them would have any objection to these general remarks - I would like to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, for reading out the message which was addressed to us by the group of women's non-governmental organizations working for peace and disarmament on the occasion of International Women's Day.

The Group on whose behalf I speak would like to thank these non-governmental organizations for the keen interest which they take in our work and to commend the invaluable contribution that they are making to the cause of peace and international security.

The Group of 21 is convinced that the commendable efforts of women to uphold the cause of general and complete disarmament is part of the worldwide commitment to ensure for all humankind a future of peace and security.

It is an honour for us to convey our sincere congratulations to all the women of the world on this day, celebrated in their honour.

(continued in English)

On a purely personal note, I would like to add - I cannot resist it - that I really think that we, the members of the Conference on Disarmament, are not really living up to the occasion, and I want to express my personal regret.

Mr. SALANDER (Sweden): It is my pleasure to extend, on behalf of the Western Group, a warm welcome to all representatives of non-governmental organizations with us today on International Women's Day. I would also like to thank the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the NGO Committee on the Status of Women for their coordination of the joint non-governmental organization statement just read out to us by the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament.

We have listened with great interest to their views, and we share the disappointment expressed at the deadlock that persists in the Conference. The Western Group joins in the statement's call to the Conference speedily to adopt a work programme. The Conference must start work on FMCT, which it already long ago decided to do, and also needs to get work going on other agenda items. We also share the deep concern expressed regarding the human suffering caused by small arms and light weapons, and we salute the initiative to hold the seminar under the rubric "In the line of fire: A gender perspective on small arms proliferation, peace-building and conflict resolution". Non-governmental organizations and civil society are important partners, together with Governments, in the process before, during and after the International Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

(Mr. Salander, Sweden)

Mr. President, I would like to express the appreciation of my Group for the words of encouragement directed to the Conference in the joint statement. It is the common goal of both member delegations of the Conference on Disarmament and of the representatives of civil society and non-governmental organizations present here today to promote disarmament and a culture of peace and understanding. The Western Group appreciates and encourages all efforts by non-governmental organizations and civil society to this effect.

Mr. PETOCZ (Slovakia): Mr. President, it is my pleasure and honour on this occasion, on behalf of the Eastern European Group and on my own behalf as well, to express my warmest congratulations to all the ladies sitting in this room: to our colleagues, members of delegations, members of the Conference staff and also to our guests sitting in the gallery. I also thank the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, for reading out the message of the seminar of women's non-governmental organizations committed to peace and disarmament.

We pay tribute to all women engaged in the complex and difficult field of activity constituted by disarmament and arms control for their deep interest in and contribution to our work and their resolve to make our world safer. They are those who bear new life, they are those who are so much committed to protecting and preserving it. We pay tribute to ladies working in international women's organizations, non-governmental organizations, research institutes, the media and other spheres of public life. We wish all of you good health, happiness and prosperity in both your personal life and public engagement.

Mr. HE (China) (translated from Chinese): Mr. President, today is International Women's Day and it gives me great pleasure to extend, on behalf of the Chinese delegation, our best wishes and festive greetings to our women colleagues in all the missions and to all the women here with us in the public gallery, as well as to all the hard-working women staff in the Conference secretariat.

The Chinese delegation would also like to extend a welcome to the representatives of international women's organizations present today at the Conference and to thank them for their message, which amply demonstrates the interest shown by the international women's community in the work of the Conference on Disarmament and their support for that work.

The main theme of this year's International Women's Day is "Women and peace". The constructive role played by women all over the world constitutes an important and indispensable part of the efforts made by humankind in seeking lasting peace, common security and universal development. For a very long time women from all countries and various international women's organizations have been constantly active in the field of international arms limitation and disarmament, making their valuable contributions to the safeguarding of international peace and security. China supports their unremitting efforts in promoting international disarmament and maintaining world peace.

In conclusion, I would like to convey my congratulations to all women on International Women's Day. I wish them good health and happiness.

Mr. SEIBERT (Germany): Mr. President, since this is the first time that I take the floor during your tenure, I would like to congratulate you on the assumption of a prestigious but daunting task. My delegation will fully support your efforts to move the Conference forward to productive work. I would also like to welcome colleagues who have recently joined us in the Conference. I look forward to close cooperation with them.

I take the floor today to draw the attention of delegations to the meeting jointly organized by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the German Mission on the verification of a fissile material cut-off treaty that will take place this coming Wednesday, 14 March. All member and observer States have received the invitation to participate in this meeting.

More than two years have gone by since the Conference established, toward the end of its 1998 session, the Ad Hoc Committee to negotiate a cut-off treaty. Almost a year ago, all States parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty agreed on the necessity of FMCT negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament. The NPT Review Conference urged the immediate commencement of such negotiations, with a view to concluding them within five years. Almost a year after that decision, FMCT negotiations have still not begun.

After the decision of 1998 we all believed that the Conference had, finally, achieved a breakthrough. Many preparations were made for the expected intensive FMCT negotiations in 1999. Capitals prepared their negotiating positions and considered strengthening their delegations to the Conference on Disarmament. In the first part of 1999 a number of activities took place in Geneva on the issue of FMCT, even though the immediate re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee remained elusive. Several seminars, workshops and expert meetings took place to prepare the ground for later, formal negotiations. However, these activities soon subsided as it became clear that the Conference on Disarmament remained in a situation of deadlock.

We have already lost almost a whole year of the negotiating time envisaged by the NPT Review Conference. From this regretful state of affairs we draw the following two conclusions.

First, we must intensify even further our efforts to attain a breakthrough and the immediate commencement of FMCT negotiations in this Conference. The German delegation will do everything in its power to support you, Mr. President, and your successors in all efforts to that end.

Second, to avoid further loss of time we should resume active preparations for the negotiations to come. These negotiations will be complex and will have to address many very technical and highly political aspects. If we are to achieve the goal set by the 2000 NPT Review Conference, it is important that both capitals and delegations to the Conference on Disarmament should resume their preparatory work. We believe that a number of technical aspects can productively be discussed even before formal negotiations begin and without in any way prejudging the outcome of these negotiations.

(Mr. Seibert, Germany)

That is why Germany and UNIDIR have prepared the forthcoming meeting, which focuses on one specific aspect of an FMCT - its verification. We hope for a broad and active participation by all delegations.

Mr. MYA THAN (Myanmar): Mr. President, may I begin by congratulating you on the effective manner in which you have been conducting the proceedings of the Conference on Disarmament and the intensive consultation with the view to reaching consensus on a programme of work. I applaud you for your dedication and tireless efforts. May I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Christopher Westdal of Canada, for his invaluable contribution to the work of the Conference during his presidency. I also wish to welcome and convey warm felicitations to all the ladies attending this meeting and the non-governmental organization community representing women around the world, on this auspicious occasion of International Women's Day. I should also like to welcome to our midst Ambassador Eui-Yong Chung of the Republic of Korea and Ambassador Dr. Rajmah Hussain of Malaysia, who have just joined us in the Conference on Disarmament.

Mr. President, I have taken the floor to endorse fully your proposal to convene an informal plenary meeting following this regular plenary meeting of the Conference. I should like to offer some comments on the complementary activities you have referred to. While the work of the Conference on Disarmament is very important and very serious, we cannot be too serious all the time. So, in a situation like this, we would do well to take a fresh look at the problems we are facing in the Conference in a lighter vein and try to inject dynamism into this forum.

Mr. President, the successive presidents, including your good self, have done their utmost to overcome the current impasse in this forum and to reach agreement on a programme of work. Hard as we may try, it will take some time to achieve this. It is therefore only logical and appropriate that we engage in complementary activity, as you call it, and address important issues in informal plenary meetings. We should contribute to the work of the Conference on Disarmament and be helpful in facilitating our endeavours to reach agreement on a programme of work.

Surprisingly, some misgivings have been voiced in some quarters on the merit of such complementary actions. These misgivings are unwarranted. Member delegations should not be shy about expressing their views and addressing current important issues in the informal plenary meetings.

On this occasion of International Women's Day, it is fitting to borrow the analogy of a lady. The Conference on Disarmament is like a shy young lady. At times she is a bit too shy to say anything or to do anything. A lady never says "yes". When she says "no", it means "probably". When she says "probably", it means "yes". In this light, you should not be discouraged by some misgivings and reluctance of voices in some quarters.

(Mr. Mya Than, Myanmar)

I therefore encourage you, Mr. President, and the incoming presidents to go ahead with the complementary activities, despite some misgivings voiced in some quarters. You have proposed exactly what I also suggested in my statement on 15 February. What is in a name? Whatever we may call it, the most important thing is to make the optimal use of the plenary meetings of the Conference on Disarmament and engage in substantive work. Complementary activities will only help but will also not hamper our endeavours to agree on a programme of work and start real substantive work.

May I also tell you another story about a doctor. Once a doctor - a gynaecologist-obstetrician - was trying to deliver a baby. The mother was in great agony and unable to give birth. The doctor peeked in and examined and found out that there were two babies, not one. The mother was unable to give birth because the two babies were quarrelling with each other as to who should come out first. In fact, both should come out and the question of precedence should not be a problem. Once this problem was resolved, the babies were born naturally and without difficulty.

We should therefore be flexible about this matter. We should not be too fussy as to whether complementary activities should come first or the other way around. What is really important is to do substantive work in the Conference on Disarmament and to break the current impasse and to do what we are supposed to do in this negotiating forum.

Mr. President, my delegation fully supports your proposal to convene an informal meeting and we also encourage the incoming presidents to do the same. Let us get down to business in earnest.

Ms. ANDERSON (Ireland): This is also the first time for me to speak, so I offer my congratulations and good wishes to you.

I take the floor only to comment very briefly on what the Ambassador of Myanmar has just said. Let me say that I really do appreciate the motivation and the seriousness of purpose of the Ambassador of Myanmar in making his intervention, and I do think as well that we are a club here and that there should be a collegial atmosphere. And there are indeed times when we should address each other with a light touch and with a sense of humour. Sometimes it can help to improve the atmosphere and to move things forward, and I do not think that I or indeed any of my women colleagues in the room would ever want to be thought of as lacking a sense of humour. But at the same time, I did feel compelled to say something about exactly how we exercise that sense of humour. I do think it is important to say on a day like today - and indeed any day - that when a woman says "probably", she is as likely to mean "probably" as a man, and when a women says "no", she is as likely to mean "no" as a man. And I think when we exercise that "lightness of touch" that can often be so helpful to our discussions, we should be careful about the way in which we exercise it and the sensitivity that we exercise. As I say, I do always feel a little reluctant to ask for the floor on an occasion such as this because one does not want to be thought to react too heavily or inappropriately. But I hesitated and then decided, yes, I should ask for the floor because it is important to be clear on these points.

Mr. MYA THAN (Myanmar): I have taken the comments of the Ambassador of Ireland in good humour. As a matter of fact, I have a high regard for the women and ladies in this room and around the world. I should also like to tell you that in my country - Myanmar - the status of women is one of the highest in the world. So what I am trying to convey here is just the need to move forward the work of the Conference on Disarmament and I just incidentally mentioned some anecdotes to enliven the discussion.

Mr. CHUNG (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, I thank you for your warm and kind words of welcome. It is indeed a great privilege for me to represent my Government in this unique and prestigious negotiating body, and I am particularly glad that my first attendance at the Conference has coincided with the celebration of International Women's Day. The message delivered to this Conference today by the international women's community is certainly a fresh reminder of the important role this forum has played and is further required to play. As a new-comer, I look forward to working closely with all distinguished colleagues in this chamber, and for my part, I shall do my best to make due contributions to the Conference. I would like to assure you, Mr. President, of the full cooperation of my delegation for your efforts to move the Conference forward and reach a consensus programme of work.

Ms. RAJMAH (Malaysia): Mr. President, thank you for welcoming me to this meeting today. This is my first meeting at the United Nations building in Geneva. I feel very honoured that my first presence at the Conference on Disarmament is on International Women's Day. I would also like to join other members in congratulating the women at the United Nations for their contribution to world peace and security.

As a new member of the Conference on Disarmament, I would like to pledge my cooperation and support for the work of the Conference in advancing the work of the meeting.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): Distinguished members of the Conference on Disarmament, at the outset of my presidency, three long weeks ago - for it is remarkable how long three weeks can be and how packed the days that they contain - I expressed my intention to channel our work in a direction that serves the interests of all members of the Conference, including the observer States. I referred to our membership of the Group of 21, to certain foreign policy principles held by Chile and to our convictions with regard to the issues that we address in this forum. I also clarified, however, that we would talk less about such convictions in order to have an opportunity, in line with our aim of serving the interests of all, to hear the views of the Conference and to endeavour to configure our work in accordance with the circumstances in which we find ourselves today.

As I have already informed the groups and the various delegations which we have endeavoured to consult, both in traditional formats and in other, new formats, the conditions are not yet in place for us to agree on a programme of work for the Conference by consensus. Our consultations were based on the mandate conferred on us by the Conference itself: to continue to explore avenues on the basis of the so-called Amorim proposal, contained in document CD/1624.

(The President)

One of the driving forces behind this exercise has been the desire to preserve the political status of this proposal, which we see not merely as one more document, but rather as a capital asset, resulting from a process which has been under way for at least two years. The Amorim proposal is the outcome of the efforts of various presidents, who have tried out and tested different formulae with a view to achieving convergence between the different positions within the Conference. These presidents include Ambassadors Rodriguez Cedeño, Dembri, Kreid and Lint. It is in this sense that this proposal is an asset, a heritage, which we must safeguard for the good of the Conference itself. Most of you have heard my analysis of the current situation, an analysis imposing no requirement to adopt the Amorim proposal as it stands, there being no agreement to amend the operative part of the Amorim proposal, which would be the second scenario. Nor has there been any progress on the idea of opening up the presidential declaration, so that we can make use in it of that constructive ambiguity about which we have spoken. In other words, taking the three scenarios providing the context for my own presidency, there are some in which we believe that we have gone backwards, our positions have hardened, and others in which either no progress has been made or the signals which have been given have not been sufficiently ambiguous to enable us to continue working on them with any measure of optimism.

Now, this does not mean that there is no way out. Clearly, what is at stake here, as I have already said at several of the consultations which I have held with you, are different approaches to the handling of time, given the external conditions - what Ambassador Westdal has called the dynamic context. Some delegations are of the view that the Conference can wait, and that it should wait for developments outside the Conference to proceed. There are delegations which are impatient and disquieted about the situation of the Conference, and there are others still who have already declared it dead and who evidently approach their own consultations with a certain measure of tedium, since they feel that they are merely performing an almost meaningless ritual.

I do not myself share any of these positions, but, after three weeks in which I have liaised with almost all members of the Conference, I have the following feelings. Our consultations, which were undertaken with a view to rendering service and listening, have enabled us to establish that, within the Conference, there is a sizeable groundswell of opinion whose adherents, above all, want a programme of work but who, at the same time, are anxious to identify the various ways in which this programme can be moved forward and who therefore believe that the programme of work may be put together in different ways.

You will all agree that the Conference on Disarmament is, primarily, a negotiating forum. This point has been unanimously repeated by all delegations. We also share this view. To many delegations, however, the fact that the Conference is a negotiating body does not preclude it from also developing complementary actions to contribute to this negotiation. We have been very careful in saying that complementary actions are not a substitute for the main effort and, in that way, we have taken great care to ensure that the Conference may not discuss any "plans B" - namely, plans providing alternatives to its main function, which is to come up with a programme of work. It is my belief, however, that the time has now come for us to decide how to proceed with our efforts to come up with a programme of work based on our capital asset, the Amorim

(The President)

proposal. I deemed it my duty to consult the Conference on this and this is also what I intend to do subsequently, in open-ended informal consultations. I would be extremely grateful for your participation in these consultations. We shall reconvene for that purpose in this room in 10 minutes.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 15 March 2001, at 10 a.m. The informal consultations are for member States and observers only.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.